

Department of Social and Public Service

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Social Service Series

Bulletin Number 17

# The Inter-Relation of Social Movements

By

Mary E. Richmond

Director of the Charity Organization Department of the  
Russell Sage Foundation

Boston

American Unitarian Association

25 Beacon Street

# SOCIAL SERVICE BULLETIN

The purpose of the Bulletin is to offer suggestions for the conduct of work for the common good in our churches, and also to give circulation to articles of value on different phases of the social question,—some original contributions, and others reprints from the magazines and the reports of various societies.

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## The Inter-Relation of Social Movements\*

At the suggestion of a group of field workers in a number of national organizations for social betterment, I undertook to prepare a list of such national movements. The list is not complete, but even in its present incomplete form it shows some things that ought to interest those who have been attending these National Conferences. It shows, for instance, that more social movements, national in scope, have been organized during the last ten years than the sum of all the movements organized before that date and still surviving. It shows, as might have been expected, that, of the thirty-nine separate national organizations launched since 1900, those that have to do with public health (eight in all) head the list. The interests of children come next with seven agencies; and the organization of the Christian Church for social service gives us seven more; then comes "Social Service in General" with five; the protection of the industrial worker with four; education with three; prison re-

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form and city problems with two each; and the protection of the immigrant with one.

The oldest organization on the list is an association of alienists, founded in 1844. Between this date and 1870 we have only the American Medical Association, the National Education Association, and the Superior Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. But the decade beginning with 1870 was a remarkable one, for it saw organized, in the order named, the American Prison Association, the Association of Instructors of the Blind, the Public Health Association, the National Conference of Charities and Correction, the American Purity Alliance, the National W. C. T. U., the American Academy of Medicine, the American Association for the Study of the Feeble-Minded and the International Y. M. C. A. Thus, it will be seen that in this one decade our interest in the criminal, the insane, the feeble-minded, the licentious, the drunken and the destitute assumed national proportions, and we have beside the first awakening of concern as to public sanitation and the use of leisure by boys and young men.

There is a rhythm in the long, slow process of our weaning from selfishness. At least, my list shows a distinct drop in the '80's, due also, perhaps, to the fact that this was a period of intense local activity, a period of the beginnings of many

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women's clubs, charity organization societies, children's charities, etc., none of them old enough to have found national expression within the decade. Social settlements had their beginning in 1887, and the new discoveries of the 90's, nationally speaking, were cities, immigrants and laborers. This was the decade of the National Municipal League, of the Baron de Hirsch Fund and of the Immigration Restriction League. It also brought us, in the National Consumers' League, the very first of a series of new movements which are all characterized by their emphasis upon the word prevention—the prevention, that is, of the preventable causes of poverty. So inspiring a watch-word has this become that at least twenty-five of the thirty-nine national associations organized since 1900 have adopted it as their own. For their more speedy extermination, the evils of our modern life are being assailed one by one. We are passing at the moment through a period of social analysis and social specialization.

All of which leads up to the practical question of the relation of these national developments and new organizations to the daily tasks of those of us who are striving, by a retail method, to rehabilitate families and to rehabilitate neighborhoods. Where, if anywhere, do *we* come in? Are we more necessary than ever, or are we soon to be superseded? Is our task limited, or is it broadened and dignified, by

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these new developments? In how far have they modified our methods and our aims already, and what further are they going to do to us in the immediate future?

Our obligation to the typical social movements represented here is already great. When I recall my share in the deliberations of the district committees of other days, which strove in perfectly good faith to find work for the children of widows and of disabled fathers; when I recall, in our strenuous efforts to make applicants self-supporting, the willingness with which we found underpaid work at home for the mother of the family; when I remember the hopelessness of our home care of the consumptive, the blindness with which we ignored the re-creative value of re-creation, and the fatalism with which we accepted bad housing conditions as part of the natural order, it does not seem too much to say that the case work of all but the least progressive of our charity organization societies has been made over by these national organizations and by their forerunners. It is true that in some instances they owe their very existence to the settlements and to the charities which have lived closest to and cared most for intensive work with families and neighbors, but they have repaid the debt an hundred-fold.

Let us consider for a moment not only what they



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have already done, but what they can still further do for those who are responsible for carrying forward what may be called the retail processes of social reform. If consciously and deliberately we could study our own case work and neighborhood work *at the point of intersection* with each of these national movements and then consciously and deliberately set to work to improve the endeavors of our own agencies at that point or those points, I believe that we should discover a means of strengthening the whole fabric of social reform and, incidentally, of developing our own work. To illustrate: When a charity organization society assumes new burdens in order to meet all possible hardships resulting from the strict enforcement of a new child labor law, invariably it aids every part of its own proper work even more than it helps the child labor cause. Its workers learn to deal more thoroughly with the whole group of families having widows or disabled fathers as their heads; its directors acquire a new courage and a clearer idea of the society's relations to industrial and educational problems; and the community itself is more willing to turn to the society for guidance, to give it more adequate support in the next forward step.

Or to take the tuberculosis work as an illustration: When a relief agency is willing to meet the tuberculosis nurses more than half way in planning

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aid that will really cure the disease, it gains a kind of experience that reacts favorably upon its relief program in all other cases of physical handicap.

Sometimes—we have to acknowledge it—the specialists wear blinders. A tuberculosis specialist who was remonstrated with for permitting families to send their children during school hours to a milk station under his control, excused himself on the ground that children from such germ-laden homes were far better off out of school. Obviously here was one whose frame of mind was calculated to alienate the interest of educators in all his health policies, some of which were admirable. He missed also that better and saner view of his own work which comes from a willingness to study the work of others with sympathy.

These representatives of national movements, to whom, as I have indicated, we are already under such a heavy debt, have been asked to tell us just what we of the settlements and other neighborhood activities and we of the charity organization societies and other agencies dealing with families can do for them. And, as turn about is fair play, I am going to venture to suggest to them one or two things that they can do for us.

In the first place, they can do the same thing that I have proposed to ourselves (no doubt they have done it already, but they can do it even more

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consciously and deliberately) ; they can study their own work at the point of intersection with our work and strengthen it just there. As I have hinted, specialization has its dangers. In medicine, for instance, we could not possibly get on without the specialist, but we are sometimes left a little breathless in the effort to get on *with* him. It used to be said of a distinguished throat doctor in my native town that he had treated throats so long that he was beginning to *look* like a larynx.

It is only to be expected, perhaps, that a new worker in a new movement embodying a newly discovered principle of social action should be impatient of the adjustments necessary with older but equally true principles. But sometimes the mood survives the newness, and "after me the deluge" becomes, by a strange meeting of extremes, a social service motto. The national organizations are not guilty—they are already well broken in—but the habit of mind which sets up the school lunch, or the model creche, or the day camp, or the out-department medical service as ends in themselves, is not unknown among us. Years ago a woman of my acquaintance became a director of a girls' reformatory. There were many things that needed changing, for it had been the ambition of the well-intentioned gentlemen of frugal mind who managed the institution to make it self-sustaining from the work



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of the inmates. One day, when his patience had been tried too far by the reforming woman, one of these gentlemen exclaimed, "Really, Mrs. Blank, it seems as though you cared nothing for this *institution*; you care for nothing but the girls." I like to link this sentence with one that I found in an annual report a few years ago, which read as follows: "A few lines written to a senator or representative, or some other small bit of work well placed, may, through deciding the fate of an important piece of legislation, have more effect upon the welfare of one's fellow citizens than many hours or even months devoted to social work of a more detailed and personal, but less constructive sort."

The old man who adored his girls' reformatory and the young man who loved his own legislative program were both specialists gone wrong. Just as if it were necessary to drop all interest in larger programs in order to do the next little thing well; just as if, human nature being what it is, we were not ten times as likely to write the letters and bombard the legislature after some retail task had brought us into personal contact with bad living conditions and had given us a sense of fellowship with those who must endure them!

This brings me to my second plea; namely, that the rehabilitation of families and of neighborhoods should be recognized, if not as specialties them-



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selves, then at least as very necessary and important branches of the profession of social service. They say that the old family doctor (to borrow another simile from medicine) is being replaced by a new type of general practitioner, who is a good all-round diagnostician and a specialist in linking together specialties. We need some such linking together badly in the field of social reform, and a good share of it, I believe, is going to fall to those general practitioners who are residents in the settlements and district workers in charity organization societies. In their quite different ways they have a very important task to perform. The adapting of these large measures to the needs of the Jones family and to the needs of the newer importations whose names are more complicated than Jones; the realization of the neighborhood point of view and of the neighborhood difficulties which stand in the way of an immediate acceptance of our sanitary and other programs—these are a very important part of the prevention which really prevents. This part of social work might almost be called a handicraft—all of the practical sciences have their handicraft side and all of the national movements can help our work by calling attention to this side often, by illustrating it copiously for the benefit of the wholesalers affiliated with their various reforms.

My third and last plea is for a linking together

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of specialties, not only in their relation to the handicraft workers in families and neighborhoods, but in their relation to one another. Throughout the whole field of social reform we need, as it seems to me, not organic union in any sense, but an "exchange of insights," which, correcting and supplementing one another, may not only enlarge our conception of the whole, but may greatly enrich social work in all its parts by the co-operative working out of effective and significant details. In other words, we need in addition to the social analysis which is now going forward and must continue to go forward—we need in addition to this a social synthesis.

In the old days we had to struggle hard in mid-stream against the sentimental people who had no social policy, no conception of a concrete whole, or even of a little part of the whole that could be described as concrete. Now, if the present trend is unchecked, we shall find ourselves again in mid-stream contending against those whose conceptions are not lacking in definiteness, indeed, but whose devotion to some one very definite means of social advance has blinded them to the main outlines of the situation.

When we of the handicraft group try to rehabilitate a family we have learned that, first, the circumstances must be understood, and that then all who are interested in their fortunes must work together,

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on a plan co-operatively thought out, to get the thing done which will put them on their feet. Could not our social movements agree in time to deal with the needs of whole communities in this way? Could they not agree to make a social diagnosis of a city or town and then decide together upon the next thing that most needed to be done in that particular place? We have not compared notes, but when we do shall we not find that there is a logical order of social development; that a playground campaign, for instance, must seek new allies in a town where most of the children work in the mill all day; that a consumers' league will die in a community which still places all its dependent girls in the almshouse; that a city beautiful movement cannot make up for the absence of drains, and cannot hide the ugly facts of overcrowding? Not only is there a logical order of social development, but many organizations die because they were born out of due season. Overstimulation of any particular social activity by a campaign of publicity which is not carefully followed by personal field work and by a series of delicate adjustments to local needs, increases this death rate. These separate social movements should, as time goes on and our social work becomes even more highly specialized than it is now, build up a social synthesis, a technique of inter-relations, involving more careful preparation of the ground for

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both our legislative and our field operations, and then a generous making way for one another, a hearty lending a hand to one another for the sake of the harvest.







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